

[From the San Jose (CA) Mercury News, Jan. 28, 2001]

GOD AND GEORGE W. BUSH COULD FACE A FIGHT, EVEN WITH CHRISTIANS, IF HE TRIES TO MAKE RELIGION MORE PUBLIC

(By Patty fisher)

I can think of only one topic that is controversial even though almost all Americans agree on it.

God.

Of course, when it comes to God, about the only thing we agree on is that God exists. And even proclaiming that publicly makes us nervous.

By many measures, the United States is one of the most religious countries in the world. Not only do 94 percent of those surveyed in a recent Harris poll believe in God, but 89 percent also believe in heaven. The country is also overwhelmingly Christian, with 81 percent describing themselves as Christians and even a greater number—86 percent—professing belief in the resurrection of Christ.

A separate poll taken after the election by Public Agenda, a non-partisan organization, found that 70 percent of Americans want religion to be more influential in society. Concerned about the moral decline in this country, 69 percent of those surveyed said religion is the key to strengthening family values and improving moral behavior.

With those numbers, George W. Bush might expect little opposition to his efforts to expand the presence of religion in opposition to his efforts to expand the presence of religion in public life. The numerous references to God and Jesus Christ during the inauguration ceremony, his declaration of a national day of prayer as soon as he took office, his plan to allow religious groups to get federal grants for providing community services—all this should be wildly popular.

And yet, I suspect Bush is going to encounter stiff opposition to any attempt to make religion more public during his presidency. Not only from Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, atheists and agnostics, but from Christians as well.

I was raised a United Methodist and get to church almost every Sunday. But as I watched a Methodist minister give the benediction at the inauguration, calling on all who believe in Jesus to say "Amen," I cringed. My 11-year-old daughter, who was watching with me, put my thoughts into words.

"What about the Jews who are watching?" she said. "What about all the people who don't believe in Jesus? What are they supposed to do?"

A lot of them wrote letters of outrage to newspapers.

One letter writer, Roy Gordon of San Jose, is Jewish and grew up in England. He is disturbed by what seems to be a trend away from the ecumenism that has made him feel comfortable in this country.

"I respect President Bush's religious beliefs and expect that they make him a better person and president, but they are not mine nor are they those of a very large number of other Americans," he wrote. "This occasion was for the whole nation, but I felt left out at the end."

Gordon went on to say: "Respecting diversity does not end with a few Cabinet secretaries; it is an inclusive attitude that has to affect every aspect of our relationships with each other."

Activist attorney Alan Dershowitz put it more bluntly in the Los Angeles Times:

"The plain message conveyed by the new administration is that Bush's America is a Christian nation, and that non-Christians are welcome into the tent so long as they agree to accept their status as a tolerated

minority rather than as fully equally citizens."

I doubt that Bush intended to offend non-Christians at the inauguration. In his speech, he made a point of mentioning synagogues and mosques. But he appears not to understand an important piece of Americans' complex attitude toward religion, which is: Just do it—and please don't talk about it.

A majority of Americans think children should be raised with a religious faith and want politicians to be religious, according to the Public Agenda poll. But they really don't think it's OK to discuss religion at work or at parties. A majority would support a moment of silence in public schools, but not a spoken prayer. More than 60 percent agree that "deeply religious people are being inconsiderate if they always bring up religion when they deal with other people." And nearly three-quarters of those polled said that politicians who talk about their religious faith are "just saying what they think people want to hear."

When Bush talked on the campaign trail about how his faith helped him stop drinking, I suspect he was not merely being a fisher of votes. People whose lives are changed by faith like to talk about it. Alcoholics Anonymous began in the Methodist Church.

But now that he is the president, he must be careful not to push his faith on others. He must not make the mistake of thinking that there is such a thing as the "religious" position on an issue. Just because I call myself a Christian doesn't mean I agree with Bush on abortion or the death penalty.

One reason religion is so much stronger in the United States than in Europe, I suspect, is our tradition of religious tolerance and separation of church and state. As long as the state is not forcing a particular religious view, faith flourishes.

The president needs to remember that while 94 percent of Americans believe in God, fewer than half voted for George W. Bush. Americans will support his efforts to bring morality back into public life, as long as he doesn't think he has God on his side.

A TRIBUTE TO ROGER LIPELT UPON HIS INDUCTION INTO THE MINNESOTA HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL COACHES HALL OF FAME

HON. JIM RAMSTAD

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 15, 2001

Mr. RAMSTAD. Mr. Speaker, Roger Lipelt is a teacher and coach who has had a positive influence on generations of Minnesotans, teaching young people the values of hard work, character, leadership and integrity while working toward a common goal.

Mr. Speaker, Roger Lipelt of Wayzata, Minnesota, one of my very best friends, will be inducted into the Minnesota High School Football Coaches Association's "Hall of Fame" on Friday, March 16.

Roger was the highly successful head football coach at Wayzata High School for 22 seasons before retiring in 1998. But if you asked him what he did during those seasons, he would tell you he was first and foremost a teacher. Roger represents the best and the brightest among educators. He's also one of the most successful high school football coaches in Minnesota history. Roger's legendary coaching career stretched over three and a half decades. His teams captured 17

conference and two section titles. His career record was 209 wins and 107 losses.

Roger Lipelt has been named recipient of virtually every coaching honor possible. Those awards were won not only because of Roger's superior coaching skills but because of his unique ability to motivate his players in a positive, uplifting way. Roger Lipelt has also been highly successful coaching both wrestling and tennis. His Wayzata High School tennis teams won two Minnesota state titles. "Coach of the Year," Minnesota All-Star Football head coach, and Hall of Fame at his alma mater, Hamline University, are just a few of the awards Roger Lipelt has received. But to simply recite Roger's remarkable coaching credentials is to not take the full measure of this great man.

Roger Lipelt truly cares about people and his community. His record of public service is as inspiring as it is long. Besides the countless young people he has helped in immeasurable ways, Roger has reached out to less fortunate people in his own backyard and across the globe in Peru.

Over the past dozen years, Roger has been deeply involved in helping the people of Peru. I have accompanied Roger to Peru twice and have seen, firsthand, the difference he has made in the lives of Peru's most impoverished people. Roger has spent countless hours with young abandoned children at CIMA Orphanage, the teenage youth leaders at Bridge House, and the poorest of the poor at Flores de Villes.

Roger Lipelt has been a friend to many families in Peru. He has facilitated numerous relationships that have been helpful in many ways. Through his efforts, 26 Minnesota families are now supporting 26 Peruvian families of Lima's "Shantytown," or Flores de Villes. Roger's group in Minnesota is known as Amigos del Peru which consists of Minnesotans who are contributing money and other resources to help the most impoverished people of Peru. Through Roger's leadership, a community health clinic has also been established at Flores de Villes.

Just like the young students whose lives Roger impacted at Wayzata High School, Roger Lipelt is now changing lives a continent away.

Mr. Speaker, Roger Lipelt is an amazing humanitarian and a legendary football coach. Please join me in honoring this great Minnesotan on his induction into the Minnesota High School Football Coaches Association's Hall of Fame. Roger is truly most deserving of our special recognition.

HONORING MS. BARBARA MELTON OF WHITE HOUSE, TENNESSEE ON THE OCCASION OF HER RETIREMENT

HON. BOB CLEMENT

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 15, 2001

Mr. CLEMENT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Ms. Barbara Ann Garland Melton of White House, Tennessee, on the occasion of her retirement after thirteen years as Library Director for the White House Inn Library.

Barbara Melton's foresight and vision as Library Director are to be commended. As the